

This Old House

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romantic garden bench
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easy garage organizer

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{ July/August 10 } **contents**

100% READER-CREATED ISSUE

our reader remodel contest

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Original blueprints in hand, a
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ILLUSTRATION CREATED BY JEFF THORNTON FOR EW.COM



A reader saw the potential in her tumble-down shed and used salvaged materials to turn it into a stylish hangout in a leafy green landscape.



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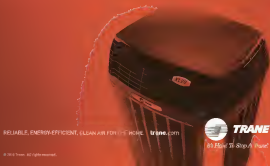


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letter {from This Old House}

One big DIY family

I get all twisted up inside. Sometimes on the outside, too, especially when don't rope or a length of garden hose about. But right now I'm twisted up inside—in a good way, mind you—having poured over thousands of submissions for the 2010 This Old House Reader Content House Plan and sample, it gets me in the gut, among your ambitions, your dedication, the pure, unadorned love you pour into your homes to make a better life for yourselves and your families.

Believe it or not, putting together this issue is the hardest job we, as editors, have all year. So many good projects. So many truly great stories. Stories of perseverance, dedication, and inspiration—I've never seen anything like it, frankly, and I have to say it makes me proud to work for the place you choose to share it with.

I am especially impressed by readers who—understanding for enough to advance the economics of remodeling—had children they could one day entrust to us down on labor coats.

Take, for example, John and Robi Corvo, our Reader Remodel Contest grand-prize winners (page 76). They made use of August and Ella for a good half-dozen poses before finishing their sweet little Cape. That's good investment.

And then there's Ryan and Andrea Kragstad, who put daughter Anna to work. As you can see here, Anna's painting skills leave a lot to be desired, but she sure seems to make up for it in enthusiasm. There was a lot of preschool tool schooling out there: Jon Redmond with his daughter Eva; Jennifer C. and her son, and finally, Amanda and Matthew Wilke, who not only managed to get work done of daughter Ella but also found a clever way to screen her to the street. Can't do on college tuition costs, I imagine.

It wasn't all tiny tots, of course. Judi Guerin of Laramie, Wyo., not only got her floor installed cheaply but also gave her boy Shepherd a head start on a useful trade.

To be fair, we found great stories of children taking rapid advantage of parents. There was Derry Go, whose husband



Look for this symbol throughout the issue. It highlights projects, stories, ideas, and tips from TOH readers.



Anna Kragstad



Shepherd Guerin



Derry Go



Jon and Eva Redmond



Jennifer C. and Matthew Wilke



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letter (July/August 10)

and father built a charming seaside nest made, then she and her husband built a gaze and fence outside to keep the snails away. Now her dad, I know, but the wild snails that decided to take up residence in the backyard.

Hend's of Morgantown, W. Va., and her dad owned a dilapidated 1980s barn purchased for \$25,000. Hend's wanted to keep the cows down not only by using dad, personally, but also by using recycled materials from the local Habitat for Humanity ReStore.

Lynette DeLuca of Lynbrook, N.Y., re-modeled the dated '70s kitchen in her 1,800 farmhouse for less than \$2,000, excluding appliances, with her dad fabricating the cabinets and her mom finishing the new-day wall with a coat of joint compound to blend with the old walls. I would like to speak to your parents, Lynette, I'm wondering if they're interested in a new son.

Oh, and here's a family story I loved hearing! Geoffrey Seale of Laurel Springs, N.J., modernized the "mom-and-dad kitchen" in his 92-year-old mother's home—the house she was born in, built in 1887 as a wedding gift for her grandfather by his great grandfather. "Mother does not like change," he says. "The big challenge was to modernize the kitchen she had known her whole life without destroying the essence it held for her."

In the end, Geoffrey reports that Mother was delighted. And so am I. For her, for Geoffrey, and for all the people who took the time to share their projects with us. We hope you, dear TOH reader, are delighted too. And if you're, well, you've got no one to thank but yourself!

Scott O'Malley
SCOTT O'MALLEY, EDITOR
scott@landshow.com



Geoffrey Seale



Geoffrey Seale and his father



Lynette DeLuca



Lynette DeLuca



Geoffrey Seale



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smart tip

homenews (July/August 10)

"Here's why TOH chose mine as a Best Old-House Neighborhood"



find a heartland house bargain



WHO: Chris Burkman
WHERE: Fort Wayne, Ind.
WHAT: Neighborhood has West Central neighborhood—and we agreed.



Fort Wayne, Indiana

> The national Federal and Ballantyne Houses start at just \$150,000

> Annual home and garden tours

> Many houses are restored, but floors-uppers are still available

MY NEIGHBORHOOD "I'm the owner of a local electric plant to the proprietor of our national car works, most of Fort Wayne's early business leaders called West Central home. From 1890 to the 1950s, they built grand houses in dozens of styles. The area falls into decades in the 1920s, builds presently look re-emerged downtown is drawing new residents who are restoring the old houses."

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This whimsical Queen Anne (top) and stately Ballantyne (below) are typical of West Central

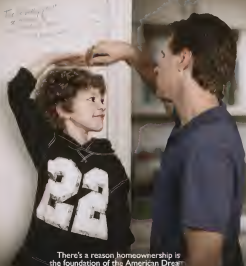
single American Four-squares, Greek Revival cottages, and Richardson Romanesque manses. Prices start at \$50,000 and top out at around \$250,000.

WHY BUY NOW? My neighborhood associated with vibrant about maintaining the area's beauty and I recently got West Central listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Our parks and newly designated bike lanes are drawing health conscious residents. And bars, restaurants and minor league baseball are just steps away."

This Old House

2010

Best Old-House Neighborhoods
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inside

FURNITURE FROM CASTOFFS

10 USES

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→ SMART IDEA

"Glass shelves brighten our view"



WHO: Matt Tavano

WHERE: Catonsville, MD

WHAT: Built shelves into his kitchen window to display plants.

After thickening existing kitchen walls to accommodate extra insulation and new plumbing, TOM reader Matt Tavano ended up with deep-set windows above his sink. So the homeowner and his wife, Cocon, put the extra inches of space to work by installing shelves for their potted plants. They chose 1/2-inch-thick pieces of glass, so as not to block the sunlight, and hung two on each window. Small strips of molding, painted to match the casing, act as supports. More than a year later, Matt's still thrilled with the result. "Now I don't have to stare at the neighbor's house every time I wash the dishes," he says.

UPGRADES

Creative recycling

With a little imagination—and some basic building supplies—these resourceful TOW readers gave a used table, a wall door and a vintage rocker new life. Here they share the steps to take for a repurposing project of your own.



From end table to rock vanity
WHO: Mary McLeod and Ron Scroggins
WHERE: Yonkers, Calif.
WHAT: "To make this

vanity, we used vinyl wallpaper and a few stacked end tables that had sturdy turned legs. After painting the piece and sealing it with polyurethane, we installed the sink basin and faucet. The plumbing and drain are hidden inside the vanity, so access there, we just have to open the cover.



From shutter to door
WHO: Lynn Boughton
WHERE: Brooklyn, Mich.
WHAT: "To save space,

we turned all the chairs into a book rack by 70-inch shutters for any book. I drilled a hole in the middle of the shutter, made mortises for the hinges, drilled and pinned the wood. Magnetic catches are at the top and bottom of the shutter, so the door shut and a ceramic knob is used for easy opening."



From door to hanging daybed
WHO: Katie Scroggins
WHERE: Oak Ridge, Tenn.
WHAT: "Building this daybed was very simple. I just added a backrest and an armrest to my 44-inch door and attached the object with a wood screw. When you sit on the door, it is raised and

it is a hanging daybed. When I need it, I attach the door to the wall and add plenty of pillows for comfort."



GARDENING

Wheelbarrow planter

Refresh your garden equipment with this smart idea submitted by several TOW readers, including Elaine Vickroy, whose before-and-after is shown here. To start, go to the house with a new greenhouse covering, then drill a few holes in it and fill with a layer of pebbles for drainage. Top with potting soil, and plant taller blooms in the center and ones that will trail over the bench's edges on the sides.



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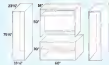
Budget built-in



Want the look of a custom built-in

without having to shell out big bucks? Consider this project from Jennifer Badier, Editor at Large, N.Y., who used inexpensive IKEA Permodero and lumber rescued from construction sites to put together a home entertainment center. Green molding, a coat of white paint, and vintage glass knobs pull the pieces together and give it character. Even better: "no one realizes it cost less than \$320 to make!" says Janice.

To make your own, set a stack cabinet between two tall stock wardrobes. Build or purchase a shelf unit with shelves to sit on the inside cabinet, then tape the entire assembly with a piece of plywood. Edge with molding and add doors for a cohesive look.



reader tip

JENNIFER BADIER, N.Y.

Give terra cotta pots a dose of summery color by coating them with exterior latex. Just seal the containers with a concrete waterproofer first to prevent the paint from peeling.

SHARE YOUR TIPS
Post them at thisoldhouse.com/tips

4 INSTANT STYLE

DIY plant tags

Making garden markers that look good is the fastest way to liven up your TOM. Readers provided a little creativity and a long way. Check out these handmade projects that caught our eye. (The first reader marker idea at thisoldhouse.com/tags.)



Metal mosaic

WHO: Linda Crocker
WHO: Walnut Creek, CA
WHAT: Turned old mosaic plates into garden ornaments. (Contact by e-mail: lucrocker@earthlink.net.)



Stamped concrete

WHO: Sarah Helms
WHO: Bangor, Maine
WHAT: Used an off-the-shelf kit to turn 10 1/2-inch x 12 1/2-inch concrete blocks into garden ornaments. (See www.thisoldhouse.com.)



Painted stones

WHO: Mary Lou Skiba
WHERE: Mendota, IL
WHAT: Transformed river rocks into name tags with hot lady. (Also, plus some white paint, see thisoldhouse.com.)

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yogurt cups

Don't ditch these plastic containers after eating their contents. **TOH** reader Mark Ferrogia has lots of creative ideas for recycling them.



Mark Ferrogia
WHERE: High Springs, Fla.
WHAT: Finds new uses for plastic yogurt containers that pile up.

1 Sort hardware.

While doing re-paints, cut containers as repurposed for screws, bolts, and other small parts you've removed.

2 Start seeds.

Poke some holes in the bottom of a cup for drainage. Fill with potting soil and plant seeds. Once they sprout, pop out the seedlings and transplant them.



3 Make an ice-pop mold.

Fill a cup halfway with fresh juice, and cover with aluminum foil. Poke a hole in the foil, insert a popsicle stick, then freeze for a boozy treat.

4 Decant paint.

Use containers to hold small batches of color for touch-ups and other little projects.

5 Feed birds.

Combine heated seed or feed mix in a cup with birdseed. Insert a loop of string into the mixture, refrigerate until solid. Remove the cup and hang the feeder in a tree.

6 Catch paint drips.

Cut a hole in a lid, large enough for a paintbrush handle. Slip the handle through the opening and paint away—done.

7 Create a funnel.

Get a hole in a container's bottom for funneling small amounts of sand or liquid.

8 Protect a faucet.

When recasting or painting your bathroom, drop containers over the sink faucet handles to keep them pristine.



9 Trap slugs.

Dig a hole in your yard the size of a yogurt container near any plants being eaten by slugs. Place the cup flat with the ground, and fill with beer or salted water. Bait the rim with sliced potatoes. The pests will crawl into the container and drown.



10 Use as a template.

Trace a container's mouth with pencil to create a guideline for cutting small curves in wood.

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before+after:
kitchen

"Our handsome kitchen handles hard knocks"

TOH reader Linh-Co Nguyen shares how she and her husband used easy-care materials and a mix of vintage-style accents to create a family-centric kitchen. Photographs by JOAN DEAN

they scoredgh chairs for \$1 each



WHO: Linh-Co Nguyen, Rick Burke
WHERE: Seattle
WHAT: Created a hard-working space with an eclectic vintage look

We fell in love with our 1920s house, which was built to last. Not so much the kitchen, which was late '60s. We wanted to give it more character and function. We also wanted space for a family-size table, so we hired a framer to knock out a dividing wall and enclose a small back porch. Then we hired a pro to make our cabinets. But we did everything else ourselves, including hanging those cabinets. The kids even helped us weigh the last one in place. They also helped choose the floor pattern. I hate high-maintenance anything, so we went for commercial vinyl tile, along with quartz counters, which don't need sealing, and wood windows that say low-maintenance aluminum on the outside. I also like a bargain! I found a chrome-topped table on Craigslist and school chairs at a surplus store. Friends always say how much they like the kitchen. Some even went so far as to say it came with the house!



(before)

BEFORE: Harvest gold laminate, dull brass cabinets, and a small round wooden floor made the kitchen feel dreary. **AFTER:** Quartzite, Ah, and Marble Burke enjoy a night's sleep. Kids' school chairs that look like Art Deco pendant lights, a clear vinyl table, and a chrome new look.



before

At about 100 square feet, the kitchen was too small to host a family-sized table and too cluttered for comfort.



what we did

Adding a 40-square-foot porch created a more workable layout, adding windows brightened the space.

1. Opened up the breakfast nook by removing a dividing wall. This allowed for a longer run of cabinets and countertops.

4. Fixed up the garage, which had been jammed but cluttered by moving it to the other side of the dining room door.



2. Squared off the nook by bumping out the exterior wall where a back porch had existed, making room for a bigger table. Relocated the back door, suggested for use with a slatted glass panel, and added two more windows to channel natural light into the space and enlarge the view.

3. Created a bridge nook with a pullout pantry on one side and cabinets arranged hubbly-dubly with the other.

CUTTING EDGE: LITERALLY.



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before+after: kitchen

• the key details

• **Easy-care surfaces** include ceramic tile, engineered quartz, a sink with an integrated drain board, a hot & cold single faucet with just a single slide to clean around. Alerts white subway tile. American Dream Counter. L.S. Always. Self-Refreshing Faucet. Blanco.



• **To-the-ceiling cabinets** finished with white acrylic enamel and a period look. Soft green walls echo the floor squares as well as the white glass panels. They paired with black dots and lines in the backsplash. Cabinet paint: Master Paints cabinet line. Floor tile: Armstrong Exolon Trim tile. American Dream.



• **A pullout pantry** organizes bulky cans and boxes and helps to form a snug niche for the fridge. Refrigerator: Bosch.

• **A hatchlike assembly** of wing glass front upper cabinets encapulated lower units shows off the owners' collection of vintage jewelry. Chrome pulls with black ridges coordinate with black backsplash. Pulls: Rejuvenation.

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"We needed a real mudroom to tidy up our kids' gear"

By putting his woodworking skills to use and hunting for bargains (\$64 clearance-sale paint!), TOH reader Allan Wiggins tapped his laundry room's organizational potential.



WHO: Allan Wiggins
WHERE: Sumner, Ga.
WHAT: Transformed laundry into a well-appointed mudroom.

We loved having our laundry room right off the kitchen, but it seemed like the space wasn't being put to good use. The room was dark, with nothing but a trash can against one wall. With our kids' backpacks and dirty soccer cleats cluttering the space, my wife, Elaina, and I realized we needed a full-fledged mudroom, and this was the perfect spot for it. Woodworking is one of my hobbies, and I envisioned filling the space with cabinets and a long bench. After moving the washer and dryer under the window, I started making cabinets for the newly blank wall. I found a cabinet-supply shop willing to sell to the public, which saved me a bundle. I wanted to do everything myself, but our kids would've cost more to buy the tools to make cabinet doors to match those in the kitchen than to order them, so I had them made instead. Working nights after work, it took 11 months. But now my wife is blown away by how much storage we have, and the kids love having their own labeled shelves and hooks.

before: The bare-bones laundry room had no efficient layout and makeshift storage.

after: Stan Turner, 3, gets up for soccer on the built-in bench. New cabinets, labeled shelves, and small hooks hold families' belongings in parking, and custom coat bins lend the room charm.



Colorful, custom coat bins



[before]



Colorful, custom coat bins

+ Ceiling-height cabinets add a few walls, providing plenty of storage space for laundry detergent, pet food, and other supplies bought in bulk. Hooks and shelves keep the bins, shoes and sports stuff neatly organized.

+ Beaded molding not only complements the trim on the new cabinets from the doorway to the adjacent kitchen.



By adding beaded molding, the doorway to the adjacent kitchen is highlighted.

+ Two coats of polyurethane sprayed onto the cabinets and bench provide a durable, maintenance-free finish. The vibrant, glazed white cabinets pop against the green walls. **WHAT:** Viquez Lighting House. **Cabinet paint:** Viquez's Rustic Lane.



With a touch of green, the new cabinet doors are highlighted.

charm on the cheap

the project tally:

Tone-existing cabinets	\$0
Bought new paper, hangers and wiring to relocate the washer and dryer hookups	\$130
Built new cabinet boxes out of 1/2-inch plywood with face frames and pocket trim	\$268
Hardware shop made the beaded cabinet doors	\$298
Put up tongue-and-groove paneling, crown molding, and corbels	\$338
Installed new cabinet hardware: hinges, knobs and coat hooks	\$57
Primed, painted and glazed the new cabinets and bench	\$96

total

\$967

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landscaping

"I built a monster of a pond"

It started with a pile of rocks. Then, over several years, TOH reader Gary Rensi grew his pond plans to include a 30-foot-long waterfall, a bridge, some fish—and over 150 plants.



his yard went from weedy to wow



WHO: Gary Rensi

WHERE: Lawrence, Mich.

WHAT: Spent three years building a pond and waterfall, then landscaping around it.

I'd been collecting rocks for years. I'd always wanted a pond, so even at my old house I'd been piling up big stones from around the yard to eventually use for the project.

When my wife, Jody, and I moved into our Cape with our daughter, Harlee, in 2000, we got 16 acres of land along with it, and a front yard that was just weeds and some screwing, sucky pine trees. Off to the side of the house, near the winding driveway, the yard had a dip that looked like a perfect spot for a pond. That's where my rock collecting got really crazy. I headed up the rock pile from our old house, packed downed stones from the neighbors'



[Before]

before. A dip in the yard below the driveway and on right of the front porch was the perfect site for this pond.

SITE: A rock-lined waterfall channels water through three small pools before it flows into the pond. Grasses and junipers add texture; water lilies shade the bot-

yard—even stepped the car when I spotted race cars along the road.

Though I'd never done anything like this before, I knew I could, with the help of a few books and plenty of pages torn from *This Old House*. The experience of renovating our first home, an 1880 farmhouse, then landscaping the yard of our second place built up my DIY confidence. And it was happy to justify the \$11,000 master I bought to clear the yard and help maximize the size. I figured it'd be handy in clearing pasture for our horses.

After spending a year heeding rocks, I spent another digging out the irregularly shaped 14-by-26-foot pond and shoring up the walls with 650 sandbags that I filled by hand. Then, after adding the liner, came digging large boulders to the pond on an overgrown car hood channel to my tractor. Placing the water pump and filter led to buying some dirt to make the waterfall flow just right. After that I figured some law would be nice, too.

I turned glass with lots of color and texture around the pond. Between my plant-guns, father-in-law's advice and my own research I knew what I wanted, and scored shrubs and perennials for up to 70 percent off at end-of-season sales. I spent the next two years planning about 150 plants. But I'd like the pond still needed something, so I put in a bridge.

My wife and I haven't moved, would care up a lot of time, and a dog. But with the benches I added, it's also a perfect spot to sit and watch my girls riding in the pasture below. ■

more green thumb

See what's new in plants and garden tools at thisoldhouse.com/bonus



The bridge is made of pine boulders reclaimed from an old deck.



girly boys:

"I bought plants on sale and sunk them in a mulched, 20-by-30-foot 'nursery' bed all I needed them."

above: Tailwind spruce, Mountain bluebird, Hairy woodpecker, ornamental grass, Blue Star Juniper, black-eyed Susan, and daylilies are some of the stars of the pond garden. Left: River-Bow herbary series, and below: new line of the driveway from the house. Below: A copper handrail, built and painted elements of the pond design.



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paint
ideas

"I wanted a nursery with a unique theme"

Artistic mom and TOH reader Vanessa Butler painted a wraparound mural using colors she had on hand and some classic elephant prices.

see what
you can
create



WHO: Vanessa Butler

WHERE: Rocky River, Ohio

WHAT: Painted a mural that practically
walks and talks

When my husband, Jeff, and I were first dating, he lived in some
one with elephants prices from a
book, he and his twin brother had
memorized it like, can't say it
worked. Luckily, there was a way

other charming things about him. But we still love that book, and years later, pregnant with
twins, I thought it would be a perfect subject for a mural in their room.

I work at a school, and that's where I got the idea of using an educational project to help cre-
ate the mural. I began by doing a drawing on paper, overlapping the elephants so that I could fit

The nursery really happened
one at a time as a paint coloring
and went up with the help of an
overhead projector and blinds at
Jeffrey's school. The elephants
prices didn't even have the cells
shadows, and different shades of
blue for the whole room together

more in. Then I scanned the drawing into my computer and printed it on a sheet of plastic called transparency film (available at office supply stores). Placing it on my bed-spread projector, I was able to enlarge the drawing to fit on one wall. After making small adjustments, I outlined the shapes in pencil. Now I was ready to paint.

To save money, I painted three walls blue and then created a palette with what was left of the blue and other random leftover paints, some of which I blended and lightened with leftover white. My plan was to do all four walls, but I was seven months pregnant and pretty tired! So I flipped the transparency, moved the projector closer, and created a smaller version on an adjacent wall. I used round sponges from a craft store for the polka dots on the ears, and an artist's brush for the forehead lettering.

Today our twins wake up surrounded by elephants asking silly questions like: Is their room is unique. Jeff can't wait till they're old enough to recall the answers. ■



VANESSA SAYS:

"Pick an uninterrupted wall for your mural, and repeat a portion of it on an adjacent wall to keep the theme going."

See more

Find inspiration for your home as well as other topics and projects at diy.com/ideas



Vanessa with Julia and Vaughn (TOP) was inspired by her husband's favorite kids' book (*101 ELEPHANT JOKE*). She painted one big mural (*PHOTOGRAPHED*) and a portion of it on an adjacent wall (*LEFT*) using leftover paint of which: *Green Cloth* by Behr; and *Lucia Ashley Home's* *Cast Caribbean* and *Bottle House Home's* *Brilliant* both by Valspar.

2 COATS OF PAINT

(over water stain)

1 COAT OF KILZ® PRIMER

1 COAT OF PAINT

(over water stain)



Mike Cosmo, KILZ primer user and pro painter for 30 years

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"I love the Out of Africa feel"

TOH reader **Liz Shivel** was just one of dozens of you who proclaimed your love for this breezy outdoor room. Here's how to create a similar look in your home. *Photograph by DEBRA GORDON*



WHO: Liz Shivel
WHERE: Huntington Beach, Calif.
WHAT: Chose this space in a reader poll
"The room takes me on a sensory journey"

When it comes to outdoor entertaining space, striking the right balance between casual and sophisticated can be a challenge. This open air dining room makes it look easy, blending South Colonial-style furnishings (including a casual dining table for only \$20 at a flea market) with laid-back, shag-inspired touches like rattan lamps and flowing curtains. "I chose elements that had meaning but also a lot of color," says Trip Hoffman, who designed the space. Bamboo chairs surround a glassware-holding fern table while accent pieces perch atop an antique iron console, adding pops of color and help define the pale floor. "When an equally eclectic look for your place? Try these picks."

bamboo folding chair

Reflecting the room's Caribbean influence, this seat features a hand-painted turquoise finish and woven detailing. \$18 for two (at bamboofurniture.com). Right now it's available in white or brick red colors. bamboofurniture.com



glass-panel lantern
Forty-four-inch antique-style lantern with a hand-painted turquoise finish. It's coming enough for a fall price. \$20 (at bamboofurniture.com)



you
voted
for it!

ceiling fan

Sublime for any domestic outdoor room, this fan supports four blades in a hand-painted finish. It has a hand-painted finish. \$134 (at bamboofurniture.com)



bamboo bowl

Don't just look, use this bowl. It's made of bamboo and is a perfect place for ornate or for coconut palms. It's shown in the photo above. \$25 (at bamboofurniture.com)



natural lamp

Thought it is not ideal for outdoor use, this lamp is made of bamboo and is made of bamboo. \$270 (at bamboofurniture.com)

farm table

The designer adding surface area to her room is a perfect example of a perfect example. This painted version with turned legs is just as charming. 36-by-60-inch table, \$899 (at bamboofurniture.com)

botanical throw pillow

Featuring a hand-painted design, this throw pillow is a perfect example of a perfect example. \$25 (at bamboofurniture.com)



handwoven rug

Here's a perfect example of a perfect example. This rug is a perfect example of a perfect example. \$337 (at bamboofurniture.com)



wrought-iron console

An antique console table with a hand-painted finish. It's shown in the photo above. \$500 (at bamboofurniture.com)

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"A tight budget won't stop me"

These clever TOH readers used their DIY skills, negotiating tactics, and creative recycling techniques to realize their visions in every room they renovated.

BY DEBORAH DICKSON • ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN CUNEO

they saved 10,000 bucks!

Bedroom: "I transformed old laboratory cabinets into laundry-room storage."



Donna Brown,
Camelton, Ohio
When we sold our laundry room, we had to have a place to do the plumbing and vent the dryer, so there was a lot of cash left over for extras. Thanks to The Old House which gave me the idea to look on Craigslist. I found old furnishings from a college chemistry lab and made the cabinets into shelves to store laundry and household supplies. I repainted them by painting them and adding beadboard sides and new hardware. I also sandblasted the heavily speckled counter tops and finished them with a coat of enamel oil, and they look just like soapstone!
What Donna saved: \$104

Bedroom: "I found a cheap way to dress up ceiling timbers."



Davey Rogers,
Montclair, N.J.
I repainted a hung ceiling where we remodelled, only to find it had been covered up in stained sagging plaster and lead-casting. So I repainted it down, too, and exposed the Douglas fir ceiling joists. I left the Douglas fir ceiling joists in their original color. They were dirty but structurally sound, and did not need repairs. I boxed them with mock plywood and stained the mix with the refinished floors and new white room ceiling and accents.
What Davey saved: \$1,000



Yard: "I made my own rain barrels."



Tony Stankiewicz Jr.,
East Hartford, Conn.
I like collecting materials for my projects. I found a lot of old barrels at the cost of the barrels at the garden store. So I picked up two cleaned out 55-gallon plastic drums from a local delivery shop for free. I drilled holes through each one and connected them by using a short 1-inch hose. The result was a low-cost rain barrel.

one barrel to provide an outlet for the water to collect. I also placed an old gutter and downspout with diverter into one barrel to channel every overflow. The only things I had to buy were hoses, two plastic hose ends, and water-proof epoxy. Now, with 100-plus gallons of water on standby, my garden won't be thirsty!
What Tony saved: \$100

Kitchen: "I got a custom top installed to give me a trade discount."

Jane Gensko, Jersey City, N.J.



"I wanted to add a granite-topped bar medium-size eating bar but didn't want to pay full price. So I went to a local restaurant and looked at granite samples for jobs they were working on. One of them fit my color scheme, and I asked if they'd be willing to accept additional material for me and pass on their volume discount. They agreed—and I got the countertop I wanted for a huge discount."

What Joe saved: \$700

Exterior: "I made custom-shaped shingles for siding."



Brenda Bourdau, Denver-Forest Hill, Maine
When I remodeled my lakeside cottage, I wanted to clad it with shingles of different shapes to give it some style. Instead of buying them preshaped, I created three different profiles myself using a jig and various routing tools. First, I cut cedar shingles to be 4 inches wide. Then I created scalloped, ridged and fish-scale shingles with the help of a drill press and hole cutter, and made shingles

with pointed tapered edges using a compound miter saw. It took a lot of work, but worth my time because it saved me so much."

What Brenda saved: \$4,000

Basement: "I made a concrete floor look like tile."



Frank Corral, West Wildwood, N.J.
"My basement floor is concrete, and I wanted to turn it up a bit—but it's too deep for leveling and tile is so expensive. Instead, I taped all 121 sq. ft. with white checkerboard patterns. Aside from the taping, it wasn't very labor-intensive, and it came out great. Everyone who visits compliments me on my excellent tiling job."

What Frank saved: \$1,000

Living room: "I used PVC pipes to hang drapes."



Don Harpsten, McMillan, Ill.
"A local drapery shop wanted \$225 for two wood-drapery rods



that were 2 inches in diameter and 9 feet long. I'd never pay that price! Instead, I picked up two lengths of 2½-inch-diameter PVC pipe, used four wood end plugs in brackets and sanded and painted them both. They cost only \$30 and look just like the real thing."

What Don saved: \$225

Kitchen: "I used tough paint as a backsplash."



Lisa Wilson Woods, Columbus, Ohio
"For a long time, my husband and I were at odds about what

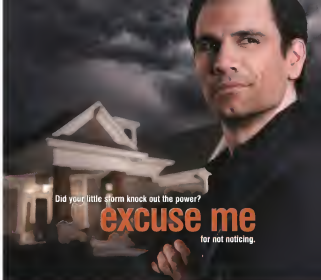
material to use for our kitchen backsplash. We decided to make a quick fix while we weighed the options because the builder's paint job was terrible—the paint would come off with a light swipe of a damp sponge! I primed the wall with stain-blocking primer, then coated it with black chalkboard paint. Lo and behold, we found just what we needed. It's easy to clean, durable, cheaper than tile, and much easier to change if we get tired of it."

What Lisa saved: \$300



you're so cheap!

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**"You've made
me a better man"**

TOH reader Shawn Coyle shares how working on a neglected 1714 Colonial has shaped his character and changed his life



1940 Sherry Boyle
 1942 Wayne Pa.
 1944 Beverly is what restoring an old
 house has taught him.

To my older and wiser friend, my teacher,
my constant companion—*Mr. Lear,*

I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you some of the things I've never been able to say.

Remember the day we met, a little over two years ago? I was a newly married 26-year-old trying to find my way in the world, and you a 294-year-old survivor in need of serious TLC. You were tired and worn, but I could see that you still had great beauty and dignity.

I paid no mind to the bad stuff people said, that you were a gold digger and had been in too many dysfunctional relationships. I just knew you'd give as good as you got.

And so, I committed to you. In return, you taught me important life lessons. Here—on both words and numbers—are just a few.

2. Welcome what history has to offer. You've seen so much in your nearly three centuries. The Valley Forge encampment was just two miles away, and your worn hands nearly welcomed great leaders, perhaps General Washington himself. Your hand-brewed meadets are witness to those roasts from the past, but also to a long-gone culture and life.

2. Embrace life's low points; they help define us. A prize winner let the rain come in and ruin your walls. But stripping away your water-logged sheetrock led me to discover your sturdy stone walls. A fresh coat of plaster, and you'll be good as new.

3 You may have to fight dirty at times, but things work out in the end. Remember that sheet of plywood that came careening into

letter to
my house

life
lessons
learned

you've given me a link to
the past (here c. 1940)

YOUR stone walls
have stood
the test of time

for you, I work
through the pain

3

Letter to my husband

with your help

I've learned to
stick to the plan

you've provided
calm amidst the chaos

It's your quirks that
make you beautiful

thanks to you,
Natasha and I have
grown even closer

4

5

6

7

my side? Well, my spirits may have flagged, hobbling around on a cast all those weeks, but it gave me a chance to focus on details, like repairing your rotted wood window casings.

4. Once you set yourself a goal, stay the course. I never considered a new project without considering those slatches, rots. They show how every room relates to a whole, and every rublet to the framing. If I follow the plan, I know the end result will be right.

5. Life can be messy, so you always need a retreat where you can find peace. Your new master suite will be amazing. I promise. But while it comes together, your blue painted guest bedroom has been quite welcoming.

6. See the perfection in imperfections. Your original ladder relied on the materials they had on hand. Some of the stones in your walls were once part of a crumbling hearth, they've got the char marks to prove it. I could have cleaned them and made you look glossy and new, but that's not who you are.

7. The more you give, the more you receive. The lovely Natasha, my wife, the architect of those all-important slatches I mentioned earlier, has been by my side every step of the way (late she is, stripping wallpaper). Our commitment to you has strengthened us. And I don't mean from all the heavy lifting. Now, as each room comes together, we're starting see the return on all our hard work.

There is still much to be done before fulfilling all our dreams, but I am confident we will get there someday. Hopefully, the piney pines of little feet will be echoing through your hallways in the not-too-distant future. And I know you will provide for our kids, protect them, and teach them some of the same life lessons you've taught me.

With love and admiration,
Steven

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HOME IMPROVEMENT TELEVISION

“Our dog loves it!”

Whether it's a PVC agility course or a cedar feeding station, you—and your dogs—are feeling inspired by our TOH pet projects

pet
projects
that raise
the bar

Ralph and Linda Wiedert were growing quite restless over their latest Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, Maddy, who, aside from gaining weight, was starting to look downright bored with life. Thankfully, that life was changed forever when the couple saw an article on how to build a pet agility course, back in September 2008. After downloading the shopping list from our website, the couple headed to the home center for some PVC pipe and fittings, then broke the course right in their own backyard. “And just look at her now,” Ralph gushes to us. “She loves that hurdle!”

Then there was Jacob and Lisa Carini, whose diminutive dachshund, Lola, threw her back out like an acryl octagon when she hopped up on the bed one day. But after they built her a ramp similar to the one in our November 2009 issue, Lola's life took a turn for the better. “I'd soon dog steps in pet stores,” Jacob says, “but I didn't want to spend \$40 when I could make something better myself.” We hear you, Jacob.

Since many of you took to your workshops to build the ramp, dog bed, feeding station, and other projects we've been showing you in this column. Here and on the page that follows you'll see how our readers have been using our projects to make their dogs' lives better than ever.



Agility course

TOH 12/07/08

“All it took was some PVC pipe and fittings to get Maddy fit and trim.”
Linda Wiedert,
Glenshire Pa.



Ramp

TOH 11/09/09

“No more back problems for our little Lola.”
Jacob Carini,
Ashtabula Wash



want more?

See samples and expanded plans of pet projects and to enjoy videos of these ideas visit diy.com/pet



Feeding station
10th OCT 2003
"I made this feeding station out of leftover trim."
Bob Clausen, Charleston SC



"Check out that aromatic cedar and the decorative bones."
Bill James, Howell Mich



save this old dog house

20th reader Belinda Palenke built this miniature for her dog, Chase, as part of our 2003 "Build a Doghouse Like Your House" contest. But hard hats and red smocks are leaving their mark on her house.



PRICE: Free (must be moved)
LOCATION: Davison, Mich.
CONTACT: Belinda Palenke and Richard Smith
rjpalenka@yahoo.com

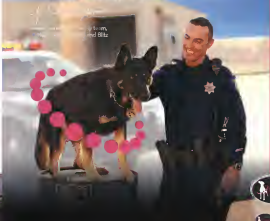
THE HISTORY: Hi, my name is Chase. And yes, I appreciated my owner Belinda's efforts to design and build a doghouse of my very own. But here's the thing: This is Michigan, folks. Ever been here? Well let me tell you it gets cold. Real cold. Even with this thick and bright red (beautifully maintained for cost of money). That's why I spend most of my time in that big (conveniently heated) house you can see in the background of the photo below.

WHY SAVE IT? From the wraparound porch to the fold-down chimney, Belinda spared no details. This house will no doubt be the pride and joy of some lucky pup in a lucky yard.

WHAT IT NEEDS: The house is in move-in condition, though the top sliding needs repair and the rollers, shingles, and spindles should be replaced. It could use a fresh coat of paint, too. (Don't tell Belinda, but I've never been a fan of purple.)



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"I found a fun way to show off family photos"

Using discarded divided-light sashes, TOH reader Leslie Greensman created a stunning picture frame. **By JARYL S. BRIDGES • Photographs by KURTIS LARSEN**

her
new use
for old
sashes



(Photo by J. Bridges)



WHO Leslie Greensman
WHERE Towhee Md.
WHAT Invented a double-hung to display vintage snapshots

You, my fellow salvager junkies, never cease to amaze me with your creativity. Take Leslie Greensman, whose window-rimmed picture frame is shown above.

Placed at the thought of a shimmering wood double-hung ending up in a landfill, Leslie's contractor husband bagged the window frame from a job site. And in true TOH fashion, Leslie put it to good reuse. Her idea: Mount photos behind the wavy glass divided lights and hang the sashes side by side on the wall.

Figuring that many of you would love a picture frame like Leslie's for your home, I set about gathering the materials and creating a step-by-step. First, I found a windowsill PHOTO easement with six panes. Then I hit the craft-supply store. Rather than mounting my photos directly behind the glass, I picked up precut sage green mats to add more depth. Reason for the how-to: a window picture frame inspired by Leslie's



Cost Window, from \$25 at salvage yards; \$13 for mats, tape, and hanging hardware. **Time** 2 hours. **Difficulty** Simple. You can only turn mats loose with an office supply paper cutter.

STEP-BY-STEP

1 Prop the window. For bare wood, rub on protective beeswax. Organized sashes guard against loss, level by sealing the flitch under clear polyurethane. Sprinkle the glass with window cleaner.



WORKING WITH A SASH
Seal off water in each photo at the back of the window with a clear sealant.

2 Measure the panes to determine mat sizes. Jet down the length and width from the center points of the surrounding panes, so mats will overlap the woodwork.



5 Arrange the matted photos on the back side of the window, and tape around their outer edges. Once all photos are in place, tape the lower edges to each other.

3 Trim the mats to size, slicing off equal parts from the sides, top, and bottom so that they'll be centered behind each pane. I used a paper cutter, but a utility knife will also do the trick.



6 Check the placement. You may have to move the photos a touch or so, and retape to ensure that each is centered behind its pane.

4 Secure the photos to the backs of the mats with traditional transfer's tape (\$7 for a 60-foot roll of 2-inch Kraft Backstock paper tape; find tape online).



7 Add hanging hardware. Screw in eye hooks on either side of the window frame. Thread picture wire through them and bend the ends to secure. Then hang your frame on the wall and revel in your handiwork. ■

"Help me liven up my bland backyard"

TOH reader Anne Bonsted's ho-hum outdoor space gets a boost from colorful flowers and a new patio. by SAL VALLIDA • Photo Illustration by HOWARD CRITCAL



(before)



she wants a place to party



With Anne Bonsted
WYOMING, NEW HARTFORD, N.Y. *interior design*
WHY? We're to turn her yard into a
welcoming spot for entertaining.

"Our home is the hub of family gatherings, but since we moved the pool years ago we haven't done much with the yard," confesses Anne Bonsted. She's raised two kids with husband Steve in that home, which her father built 50 years ago. "When we asked Bonsted-ates landscape architect Elliot Brundage to give her a few ideas, he suggested a number of things: Add flowering foundation plants for color and texture; strip the small deck for a massive patio big enough for a crowd; and frame the stone walk with a low-siting wall along an edge." "I love the idea of putting a patio," says Anne. "It would make the yard sunny." ■

Finishing touches

These outdoor fixtures and furnishings combine good looks with low upkeep



curved bench
Choose for weather's wet in any climate. The seat is just or form is little with so to create a larger gathering spot. Salvaged \$88



lantern
With a handwoven, more rustic finish this lantern has a high-end look at a budget-friendly price. Lined at \$30



fire pit
This compact and steel option can hold 2 feet logs to help the going easy when an chilly evenings. Price tag: \$350



pergola
Classic, rather than built up, natural stone, hand-chewn to a simple structure. Callahan, starting at \$14.4

WANT A PHOTOGRAPH OF YOUR IDEAS? Send snapshots to redo@thekbhouse.com

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Time: 4 hours

Differential Easy. Large parts, simple hardware, and straight cuts make this bench a lot simpler to build than it looks.

HOW IT'S DONE

Build a tool bench

We made a bench from two 67W x 16D x 27 1/4H boxes, one 67W x 16D x 27 1/4H box with three 36D x 27 1/4H inner walls, on 36W x 16D x 16H halves, and a 36 by 72 inch top. The finished bench is 32 1/2 inches tall (with casters) with a base measuring 67W x 33D. Find a complete cut list at householdsource.com/bench

wood glue	54 hours prevents the sawing and drilling	wood glue
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Hi, we're
a presentation
work surface.  Self-filter strip
not burning on
the pigment.

1998

Full-length
cDNA libraries
are available
from the
National
Library of
Medicine.

page 20 of 20

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potential for
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and wealth

more food storage

Now it's your turn to design your own. Lay out a way to stop and open a door and attach both of these things to the door.

- 2** Cut box parts: Using our online cut list and a circular saw guided by a straightedge, cut pineboard backs, walls, bottoms, and shelves to size for one large and two small boxes. Use a router to make V-notch slots in the inner walls where drawers will slide in.

- ✓ **Build boxes.** Glue and screw the bottom pieces to the outer walls of the small boxes. Space the screws about 3 to 4 inches apart. Glue and screw the outer end walls, spaced at 16 1/4-inch intervals, along the bottom of the large box.

- F** Install rail for large box. Cut a 3x2 or scrap plywood to the large box's length. After making sure the walls are square, screw the rail across the front to displace the box, flush with the tops of the walls. Cut an identical rail to install later across the front of the small boxes.

4. **Assemble base.** Place the boxes bottom up and back to back, with the small boxes flush with the ends of the large box. Screw on cleats of non-plywood lid across where the bottoms meet using 4 screws on each box bottom. Drive 4 to 8 more screws through the backs.

4. **Attach backs of boxes.** Apply glue to the exposed back edges of the boxes walls and bottoms. Set the backs in place and fasten with screws spaced about 3 to 4 inches apart.

5. Install turning strips and pegboard. Attach a frame of 1x2s on each side of the bench. Leave a 3-inch space below the top edge on one side (shown) to allow room for a power strip. Cut two pieces of pegboard to size. Screw pegboard to each frame

- IV Mount power strip**
Measure the distance between the mounting holes on the back of the power strip. Mark their locations on this side of the bench above the pegboard. Install the screws and mount the power strip to the side of the bench.

- 44** Add top: Drill angled pilot holes through the tops of the bench's sides (right), spacing the holes about 3 inches from the front and back. Screw together two sheets of 1/4-inch plywood, cut to size. Center the top on the bench. Attach with screws driven into the top's underside through the holes.

7. **Add casters.** Set casters at each of the base's four corners, about 1½ inches from each edge. Set two more casters inline with the left and right inner walls near the back of the large box, about 1½ inches from the back edge. Secure with carriage bolts through the holes in the respective plates.



pro advice
TOWERS, PERRIN,
FENNER & SMITH

"If you don't have a router to make slots for shelves, you can screw 1x2 cleats to the inner walls of the boxes instead, and affix the shelves to them."

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"I want to build a tree bench"

TOEI reader Sarah Schramm is seeking a comfortable place to sit in her tree-filled yard. This charming bench might just become her (or your) favorite outdoor spot.

By JENNIFER STAMPSON Photographs by MATT TOLSON

we
show you
how to
do it



The original
inspiration:
turn the page

"When Sarah started asking questions to build a tree bench, we couldn't keep her down. This lovely, easy-to-use outdoor room for the entire family. To build it, TOEI owner and author Mark Brown shows a specially designed and personally modified plan that's as hard and dense as an exotic hardwood, and even shows modifications, too. (You'll have to drill pilot holes for screws, so be sure to drill through it.) Put your bench together, and you'll enjoy lounging on it with a favorite book, afternoon tea, or just a good nap.

Wood: Sycamore wood (flat grain, \$2.50 per foot for decking, \$4.50 per foot for framing). Hardware: as shown.

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4



4. Make the sections

A. Begin assembling the sections. Stand the leg assemblies upright on a flat surface, using clamps to keep them from tipping over. Lay the seat boards, leaving inch spaces between them, on top of the leg assemblies. The joints between the boards should be centered over the legs. Adjust the boards so that the front edge of the bench creates a 6-inch overhang on each leg assembly. Next, create two sets of beyond sections. Attach the outer three seat boards of two adjacent sections to the three leg assemblies they rest on (two at the ends and one in the middle) by drilling 1/4-inch pilot holes through the boards and into the stringers, then driving 2-inch deck screws into the pilot holes. Do the same for the two adjacent sections that are opposite the ones you just finished together. Remove and set aside any loose seat boards.

B. Attach the remaining sections. Place the two sets of joined sections on opposite sides of the first. Place the remaining seat boards between them on top of the expanded sides of the leg assemblies. Adjust the joints and fasten the outer three seat boards to the stringers, as described in Step 4A.

see how it's done

Read step-by-step instructions for this project at www.houzz.com/weekend.

5



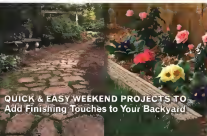
5. Install and trim the bench

A. Level the bench. Place a level on the seat of the assembled bench. Tap a garden spade between one corner and the leg until the seat is flat.

B. Cut and install the backrest. Set the edge of a framing square back with the back edge of an outer seat board. Scribe the angles of the cut end of the seat board onto the backrest's bottom edge, and level the end of the backrest following the 30-degree cut lines you marked. Glue the backrest to the back edge of the seat board. Lift the pieces from the bench and join them together. Drill 1/4-inch pilot holes through the underside of the seat board and into the backrest. Drive 3-inch deck screws through the holes. Set the assembly in place, repeat for the adjacent seat board and backrest. Glue together the mitered edges of

adjacent backrests, and drill 1/4-inch pilot holes diagonally through the joint at the top and bottom. Drive a 2-inch deck screw through each hole. Repeat until the entire backrest is fastened together. Then secure the corner seat boards to the stringers, as described in Step 4A.

C. Cut and install the apron. Measure the distance between the long joints of the design's apron stringers. Cut backwards from 1/4 inch to this length, beveling the ends with 30-degree routers. Hold one board in place by clamping it beneath an outer seat board. Drill pilot holes and attach it to the outer legs with 3-inch deck screws, as described for the backrest in Step 5B. Drive a few evenly spaced screws through the length of the outer seat board and into the top edge of the apron. Repeat for the remaining apron boards. Finish the bench by sanding any rough spots. ■



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MEET THE \$5,000 WINNERS

TOH READER REMODEL CONTEST 2010

Why they took the top prize:
They revived their snug 1940
Cape with sweat equity and
a passion for authentic detail

by RENE COENE, homeowner

Photography by DAVID PRINCE Styling by INGRID LEESE



[before]



BEFORE: The house's detail and graceful proportions were lost under a blizzard of aluminum siding.

AFTER: Warm cedar shingles, bright shutters, and crisp bands of horizontal trimwork transformed the home into a classic house. The family rooms additively perfectly in the spot selected by a screened porch.



[after]



A SATISFYING SPOT
FOR THE FAMILY

The family's new living room is a perfect blend of old and new. The room features a large window, a coffee table, and a lamp. The family is sitting on a couch, smiling.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID PRINCE

WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT'S BEEN LIKE TO fix up our little Cape? Picture my husband, John, and me up at midnight prying off door trim and sowing through plaster. We just had to widen that doorway. It was the only way to get our new fridge into the kitchen.

Eight years ago, we didn't own a firework, much less know how to operate one. But that was also before we spotted boxes of spark paint tucked in our to-do after-bath time, thanks to an old contractor fix on the tub. And before that same bath's dripping faucet finally went to cover the edge, forcing us to redo the dental room long before we wanted to. Yes, we ripped out the tub, and the faucet, too.

After that little adventure, which included a panicked call to the Poison Control Center after our 2-year-old decided to find out how easy the tile grout was (he was fine), we swore we'd put off any more renovations for a good long time.

But the house, and life, had other ideas.

When we first saw the Cape, in 2002, we knew it wasn't exactly a dream come true. John's in theater—his specialty is set design—and Tina, a graphic designer, both of us love old houses that have plenty of character, and this one had a facade as blank as a white page.

But with a toddler, and another child on the way, we needed a bigger place to live, and the house had its attractions. It sat in a historic district in Trumbull, Connecticut, surrounded by old mans and other vintage houses, and at 3,600 square feet, it was sized about right. Sure, the yard needed work, the kitchen



CENTER HALL AND DINING ROOM

The house came with oak floors, built-in fireplace with a rustic granite surround, and arched passageways. But every room needed work, including the foyer (ABOVE), which gained a new breakfast cutting, and the living room (OPPOSITE), which took on a new color palette.

“Don’t be afraid to repaint—several times if need be. It’s worth investing in a few extra gallons to get the colors just right.”

wanted, we really, really wanted a separate master bath—and did I mention the limestone ridge? Still, we could see how one day, with some work here and there, we could restore the little Cape's charm.

No sooner had we taken possession than the previous owner presented us with an amazing offer: all the original 1940 blueprints. There, at hand-drawn white on rich indigo, were all the details our house had lost, from deep wood gutter boxes (the first to copper flashing and wood shingles). It was like being handed a renovation game plan.



WHAT WE DID

Tasks: three bedrooms, one-and-a-half bath (Gare God built in 1940 and restored its charm, converting an existing playroom into an office and building a family room addition just 6 feet longer than the Himmelpfortch it replaced)

TIME FRAME: Seven years—so far—working around two careers and raising young children

WISDOM WE GAINED: By doing as much as we could ourselves including painting, filling in missing drywall, installing plank ceilings, shingling the back side of the house, replacing windows, and unclipping (instead of blowing out) the kitchen, we kept its footprint, cabinets, and the floor.

WISDOM WE LOVED: On period appropriate details including ornate shutters, copper trim, and a wood storm door.

1ST FLOOR



2ND FLOOR





But where is sewer? The guess really was, we needed a water header right away, and pipes and wiring needed replacing. We did install things, painting the dining room, replacing the stove, and adding a stone patio, a walkway, and garden fencing outside. The house looked better, but that tin siding still played at us every time we came up the drive.

Our trial by fire occurred just a year after we moved in. Redesigning the upstairs bath under the guidance of our parent plumber gave us courage, but working alongside him was also humbling. He demolished the tub and installed a new one in two days; our share of the work took four months. Part of the problem stemmed from our backgrounds as designers: Laying the subway tiles, which we undertook after memorizing a *Time* Old House video, sounds simple and you find out that John, who studied architecture in college, had to use design software to reverse-engineer the rows 10 times so that the grout lines would line up just right. Finding hexagonal floor tile in the perfect beige wasn't enough, we had to create our own pattern by replacing some pieces with white ones.

Exhausted by the end, we exchanged our vintage-look showerhead for one with a massage option and put other projects on hold for a while.

But the latches continued to make me nuts, and the kids' toys were taking over the living room. In the winter, drab by windows meant layering curtains; in the summer, rattling air collected under our heavily pitched, overventilated asphalt roof. And the old screened porch was useless much of the year.

John went back to the drawing board—or, rather, his computer—and designed a family-room addition to replace that porch. The front of the house had been hogging air ever since we saw those 1940 blueprints. To make our good bones, he constructed a roof that extended 6 inches over a wide fascia



"To save money, we used leftover tile for the backsplash and just updated the cabinets with new molding, paint, and knobs."



KITCHEN

Pinkish cabinets and a custom-placed 5/8-inch maple cabinet and crown (RESPONSE) Molding the design for the opposite wall and adding a brass cabinet and crown (RESPONSE) The new design increased storage, prep space, and shelves. Weathered built-in, a custom (RESPONSE) and an open shelf (RESPONSE) give the refurbished kitchen a custom look. Butcher-block counters coordinate nicely with the existing tile floor.



(below)



"Find a plumber who likes DIYers. Ours put in the tub, then gutted everything. I hate the word."

board and banded gear that would stand out against rich brown cedar-shingle siding. With all the structural work to be done, we knew we'd need professional help, so three years after moving in we hit the hammer and brought in a general contractor, Doug Davis. Just as Doug was framing the addition right on schedule, we had another epiphany: Inspired by a photograph I'd seen from a magazine years before, we decided the addition should have a lofty vaulted ceiling with an octagonal window in the gable end. So Doug raced off to get the structural engineer to sign off on the change, and Julia raced off to buy the window.

To save money, we insisted that Doug let us finish the addition and the siding on the back of the house ourselves. My dad showed up over Thanksgiving that year with a nail gun instead of a pie. Some of John's co-workers helped hang drywall on the inside.

Fast-forward to another Thanksgiving, three years later, when we finally turned our attention to the kitchen. We couldn't afford new flooring or cabinets, but we did splurge on a 16-inch stainless steel French-door fridge. Which brings us to the Night of the Sawdust.

We were up late poring over the floor plans when we realized to our horror that none of the kitchen's three doors was wide enough for the fridge to fit through. So we took one off its hinges—then removed the frame. The doorway was still too narrow, so we dragged out the sawdust and started slaking it: It was messy, noisy work. But it was also remarkably satisfying. After seven long years, we were close to moving our dream.

Now we just have to figure out a way to carve out space for that missing master bed. ■



EPICURE RATE

The first crew that required major work found lots of DIY skills. Bill and John spent three long months there tiling, drywalling, installing new plumbing, and hanging a medicine cabinet—then painting the room twice.



[before]

GARAGE

Chris wrote letterwork follows the shape of an arched window and was visible on the original blueprint but had disappeared over the years (BIG OOPS).

The garage gets its polished look from Penn and New Dean clumpers, a lantern sconce and a carriage-style door.

take a video tour
Go online to see more of this winning remodel: thishouse.com/tours



WINNERS OF THE TOP READER REMODEL CONTEST 2010

WHAT WE LEARNED

- 1 **Dig into your home's past.** We looked into the original blueprints, which became upside for our renovation. If plans don't exist, ask if previous owners have old photos of the place.
- 2 **Be cheap.** We glued a generalist and a practical tip by asking neighbors who were remodeling basements like ours.
- 3 **Create a master plan.** During times of chaos, it will provide a sense of order—and you can always revise it as you go along.
- 4 **Take your time.** Not trying to do everything at once is how you get to know the house better and make budgeting a lot easier.
- 5 **Ask yourself if you can appreciate.** Our general contractor gave us tips on changing the exterior. Our plumber taught us how to install a toilet.
- 6 **Don't be shy when people offer to help.** If it weren't for friends and relatives who arrived in their work clothes at any time, we would still be struggling to get the job done.
- 7 **Engage the kids.** One day they will thank you.



WORDY PICKER

- John and Bill, together with their kids, learned as they went along.
- A While hanging drywall in the addition, John and Bill, then just shy of 5, kids a picture for future families to find.
 - B After a few seasons from a pro, Bill browsed the winter weather to hang shingles.
 - C Even a then 6-year-old August pitches in painting a toilet.
 - D John, early on, tackled the new paper ceiling.

ONE-ROOM WONDERS

These
\$1,000 winners
bowed us over
with their DIY
devotion and smart,
money-saving
ideas

PLUS
The Moxie Awards!



before
Dark wood cabinets
and crowded
open shelves made
this galley feel
dull and cluttered.
After
Colorful cabinetry
and open shelving
created a airy
and efficient
space. An embossed
metal backsplash
adds vintage charm.

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**BEST
KITCHEN
REDO**

under
\$1,000 winners

**made
from
scratch**



WHO: Steve and
Sandy Miller
WHERE:
Grove Village, Calif.
WHAT THEY DID:

Created a colorful custom kitchen
on a tight budget

WHY THEY WON: Baked long hours
in the basement handcrafting and
painting all their own cabinets.

THEIR STORY: "Our kitchen was
long overdue for a remodel. So we
tipped it all out except the walls and
the floor. My wife, Sandy, then
drafted plans for a new space."

"With her sketches and a stack
of *The Old House* magazines in
hand for how-to's, I built all our
brass cabinets in the basement.
Sandy painted them a glossy green
to play off the new, butcher-block
countertops."

"For the layout, we designated
one side for cooking and cleaning,
with the range, sink, and
dishwasher. The other is for
storage, with the fridge, handbuilt
paneled pantry cabinets, open
shelves, and a glass rack."

"Even with extras like the glass-
door inserts, steel pulls, and pressed-
metal backsplash, we spent just
\$6,000 on materials. And by doing
the installation, we saved enough to
splurge on \$10,000 worth of new
stainless appliances. For a software
engineer who builds stuff as a
hobby, so this was quite a project! It
took seven years, working in stages,
but it's one dream come true."



before
Rental-grade fixtures and a dryout with lots of open space made for an awkward bathroom.
after A spa-inspired shower and a tiled olive-hued tub add luxury, while a vintage-stained glass window and hand-painted floor tiles bring in the outdoors.



(before)

BEST BATH REDO

by \$1000 Worth



perfect fit



WHO: Amy and Doug Martini
WHERE: Franklin, Ind.

WHAT THEY DID: Turned an awkward bath in their 1870s Folk Victorian into a sweet retreat with an elegant vintage look.
WHY THEY DID IT: Did a total gut redo themselves, cut off the

space to a new location so it's not too far from the house. But in the new 10-by-12-foot space we saw a chance to create charm, function, and luxury.

"My husband, Doug, a runner, wanted a working pedal tub, but I was all about a spacious shower with a rain-style head. The challenge was fitting in both without closing off the room's windows and two doors, all aimed to expand midweek. It took careful calculation—we drew the fixtures out from the floor in marker, before moving it up—but we made it work."

"We played on the tub and glass shower walls, but we got the rest far away. The entry wall paint was discovered 'mistake,' the Restoration Hardware medicine cabinet was an eBay find, and I rewired the \$3 vintage pendant light. Then there's the 140-dek that Doug turned into a vanity. For a final touch, we fitted one of the windows with stained glass we found at a antique mall. What was supposed to be a three-month project took seven. It was tough with full-time jobs, but it was worth the wait."

BEST EXTERIOR REDO

by \$1000 Worth



(before)



period paint job



WHO: Debra Martin
WHERE: Manchester, Mo.

WHAT SHE DID: Added a historic-style palette and minor curb appeal—in an 1870s farmhouse plagued by a serious case of the beige blob.

WHY SHE DID IT: Started a custom vacation and one month's worth of

weekends to bring cherry period charm to her home's tired-looking facade.

HER STORY: "When my husband, Chris, and I bought our home, we knew it'd be a struggle to restore its status. The paint was peeling and cracking, and some clings were had started with exteriors sipping \$10,000. We couldn't afford to hire out the job. That's when our neighbor Doug, a former pro painter, volunteered to help, working far west to working."

"I wanted colors that would make the original gingerbread details pop while staying faithful to the home's history. So I researched Victorian-era palettes and created a complementary scheme of pale olive and red with cream accents. With my choices in hand, Doug got busy replacing damaged boards and painting while Chris and I were at our office jobs. On weekends Chris studded, primed, and painted the shutters while I figure the picket fence a face-lift."

"It took countless trips to the home center, two weeks off work during the summer, and a few do-overs to get all the cornbells, columns, and trim to match—keeping track of all the paint's designated colors was a real challenge! Now that we're done, we receive so many compliments from passersby. We've even got some unexpected praise from a close-value, shy neighbor, who told he'd now have to repaint his place just to measure up!"

On Facts
Peeling paint and rotted boards undermined the beauty of this 1870s farmhouse.

After
A rich-khaki palette with cream accents and a vibrant red shutters a dramatic on its own.

before
Squirting chlorine got more use out of the long ignored shed than the homeowners did after salvaged windows and a gabled porch addition gave the exterior a cottage look. A hanging, draped inside provides a charming perch for napping.



before



garden room with views



WHO: Lynn Thompson
WHERE: Escondido, Calif.
WHAT SHE DID: Transformed a dilapidated shed into a welcoming indoor-outdoor den

WHY SHE RICH: Cleverly integrated salvaged materials, and soon lost to save the shabby shed from coming in HER STORY: "When my husband and I moved into our home, in 2001, we inherited an old, lonely shed. But while planning my new home garden, I saw that the outbuilding had potential as a focal point in the center of all that leafy green. So I mapped out a renovation plan, including lots of windows and salvaged materials; making old things is a passion of mine."

"My talented carpenter (and cousin) Krag and I worried that we wouldn't find enough vintage windows to make an impact, but we got a lucky break. Driving along one day, we came across a guy who was



BEST SHED REDO

by Lynn Thompson

replacing all the beautiful, wavy glass ornaments on his 1920s cottage. He let us take them for free.

"We're relaxing for the windows, the whole place almost came crumbling down. The weight of the load right after shaking that we'd put on the roof caused the shed to lean. But Krag quickly supported the windows, and we finished the walls that day."

"Our final touch was a galvanized porch with leg columns. Three months of work and \$6,400 later, the project is now complete, and my gin threads and I put love hanging out on the room and was going on the daybed—it's like we're in a house."



before
Cluttered and uninspiring, the basement also reeked of smoke from a faulty fireplace. **after**
Built-in media center, a new gas fireplace revives the small, sooty basement and adds main floor.



decked out for fun



WHO: Cindy and Tracy Lommer

WHERE: Rose, Mich.

WHAT THEY DID: Turned an uninspiring basement into a souped-up recreation space for watching movies and playing pool.

WHY THEY RICH: Rebuilt the fireplace, added built-ins, wallpapering, and a wet bar all on their own for only \$14,400.

THEIR STORY: "We bought our 1957 ranch house for this reason: we just had to look past the dated interiors. The worst was the messy basement, which also smelled of smoke from a poorly ventilated fireplace. To eliminate the stink (and the pain of logging logs down stairs), we put in a new gas-fired insert. They created a great hot date surrounded by pleasantly smelling tiles until they fit snugly, without any joints. I love how it looks like a patchwork quilt!"

"We then finished the fireplace with built-ins, adding much-needed storage. Hidden in the cabinets is our home-theater gear. We built the door frames and covered their centers with speaker holes, which allows us to use a remote control even when the cabinets are closed. We also built the Craftsman-style wallpapering—on top wall acts as the sill for new vinyl replacement windows—and crafted all the window casings to match."

"To make the room party-ready, we added a wet bar and a salvaged pool table that Tracy restored. Our new basement is such a breath of fresh air, literally. Our guests no longer choke on smoke!"



before



THE MOXIE AWARDS

Think you'd have the stamina at age 92 to paint a trompe l'oeil pattern on your patio? How about the confidence to build your dream kitchen...over an indoor swimming pool? Well, *TOH* readers Alan Schackner and David McKenney certainly did! And for that, they, along with five other extraordinary homeowners, take top prizes in this, our second annual *Moxie Awards*. Their steely nerves and unflinching perseverance left us awestruck—and, more important, earned them a place on these two pages so that you, too, can be inspired by their stories. —By Natalie Rodriguez



summer-school superhero

WHO: Ryan Papp **WHERE:** Lawrence, Kans.
MOXIE MEASURE: Ryan, high-school teacher, knew that creating his dream kitchen for just \$15,000 would be one of his toughest assignments yet. So instead of relaxing during his summer vacation, he hunkered down with some how-to books and schooled himself in construction. Looking for a dirty alternative to a stone countertop, Ryan decided to make his own out of concrete. He built a 12-foot-long wood mold for the slab top, then moved his dad over to help him mix and pour the concrete. After smoothing and leveling the surface with a trowel, he let the concrete cure before using a diamond polishing pad to give the counter a mirror-like shine. He did so proud.

first-place creativity

WHO: Sam Vela **WHERE:** Littleton, Colo.

MOXIE MEASURE: How to get the look of swing-out, tri-rings-style second garage doors when your budget only allows for one! Overhead? Well, you're, of course. Or so thought this young man, who tried to visit to get a pro to finish his doors with a round-panel and swing-back motif. When more were willing to take on the project, Sam realized to do it himself. After mulling the Internet for step-by-step and studying their designs and color palette on a sample panel offered up by the garage-door retailer, he sized the precious hours when he over 2-year-olds were napping to work on her doors. The project took about five months, but the results are so inspiring, even the neighbors were hooked.



gritty rock star

WHO: Lucie Rytton **WHERE:** Hartman, Mich.
MOXIE MEASURE: When Lucie wanted to share the magic for her weekenders with friends, she didn't run to a mason or even a stone yard. No, that would have been too pass—and expensive. Instead, she built a new wood frame, dug and hauled heavy stones in sight from her yard, then spent three months installing them in place. The heart is now the perfect cozy centerpiece. And it cost her only \$300 in materials.



concrete champ

WHO: Alan Schackner **WHERE:** Franklin, Ill.
MOXIE MEASURE: A 62-year-old World War II veteran and former globe-trotting harmonica player, Alan is used to challenges. So when his 338-square-feet of poured concrete patio and walkways needed a makeover, he knew he was the best man for the job.

Grinder in hand, Alan carved grooves in the shape of railroad spurs and finished each spur with one of eight shades of earthy-brown paint. It took 12 weeks, working under the hot Arizona sun, but now Alan proudly shares his innovative how-to when visitors admire his "patron" and ask for his contractor's name.



unwavering visionary

WHO: David McKenney **WHERE:** Richmond, Va.
MOXIE MEASURE: The prohibitively high cost of having a pro to repair his deteriorating indoor swimming pool dampened David's spirit until he decided to do away with the weary attention and create a combo great room and kitchen in its place. After consulting with a few engineers, he set to work on the dramatic conversion himself. On his to-do list: drain thousands of gallons of water with a sump pump, dig French drains, and build a stable platform using load-bearing cranes. It took a year of nights and weekends, but the new room is his family's favorite hangout.



best teamwork

WHO: Stephanie and Marcy Miller **WHERE:** Decatur, Ill.
MOXIE MEASURE: It was a heart-wrenching decision for Stephanie to dump the upstairs half of her, her daughter Marcy's, sale by 100. The 11-year-old is autistic and found long walks in the rain therapists. Problem was, the room was in such dire need of rehab that no one was even agreeing through the door. To help Marcy cope, Stephanie took her to every hardware and bath store so that she could pick the materials and fixtures. Expanding the space to fit a wall shower and a new master tub helped create a peaceful oasis for the whole family—especially Marcy—now more.



dream-achiever

WHO: Matt Bernstein **WHERE:** Beltsville, Md.
MOXIE MEASURE: For 38-year-old Matt (in '93), Colonial was the prep work of a lifetime. As a kid, he used to gaze at the house through the school's big window and imagine what it would be like to live in it one day. But when he was finally old enough—and financially stable enough—to buy the house, it was in rough shape. Dreaming, dreaming! With a bulldozer, Matt gutted out a central core. He put in a year and a half of work and all his savings just to improve the house enough to get a bank loan and a mortgage. After three more years and with lots of free labor from his dad, Jeff, and family friend Jim, he's finally realized his boyhood dream.





aren't
you
clever!

28

READER TIPS that save time & money

photograph
by
DICK KRAK

anything
by
Larson Nelson

Amazing! That's all we could say after reviewing all the DIY tips and tricks you gave us this year. So we've come to an obvious conclusion: You're all a bunch of better-than-Thomas Edison—*inventing* with innovative, practical ideas and always looking for ways to save a buck or avoid a trip to the store.

With each of these tips, your resourcefulness shines through. For example, Don't have a fancy but

too much screws? No problem, see Tip 7. Can't afford a custom marble threshold? Check out Tip 13. And who knew Shop-Vac could be used to dig holes? (See Tip 8.)

As Editor, I said, an inventor needs a good imagination and a pile of junk. We can't supply the junk, but there are plenty of ideas here to spur your imagination. We're counting on you for another round of tips next year.

Paint problem solvers

1 | Recycled paint bucket

Take a plastic laundry detergent container and cut it off about 150 inches above where the handle connects with the container (see photo above). It's easy to hold and easy to clean. —Charles Blackett, Fort Collins, Colo.

2 | No-grit sandpaper

If you find that dust coats have left a rough surface in dry paint

or varnish, rub it down using the back of the sandpaper. —Doreen London, Oakville, Ontario, Canada

3 | Cheap paint solidifier

Rather than buy the powder that dries up leftovers before paint, mix in some sawdust. Let the paint stand for a week before you pour it in the trash. —Daniel Fitzgerald, Chelmsford, Mass.

4 | Switch-plate paint chip

When I paint my walls, I also paint the wall switch and outlet plates. That way I have a "chip" I can take to the paint store to get touch-up paint that matches the actual faded color on my walls. —Barbara Scheppe, Roseland, N.J.

Old tools, new uses

5 | Hole-saw wonder

In order to set a new PVC toilet flange into an old iron pipe, I had to get rid of the pipe's continuous buildup, so I used sandpaper around a hole saw, checked it in a drill, and send it away all the girls. —Glenn Muscarelli, Adelphi, W.

6 | Vacuum for stones

Every winter, loose stones from our gravel driveway end up on the grass, where they can damage my lawnmower blades. Raking them up is hard, but sucking them up with my Shop-Vac is easy and doesn't damage the grass. —Andrew Costantino, Yardley, Pa.

7 | Screw remover

If a screwdriver can't remove a rusted or damaged screw, drill about 1/8 inch into the screw head with a 1/8-inch bit. Then hammer a 30 square-inch bit into the hole. Put an impact driver on the bit and back out the screw. —Wayne Gladwin, Madison, Wis.

8 | Shop-Vac for potholes

I was having a heck of a time digging a pothole in a tight space alongside a wall until I came up with this approach: Scare a hole a foot or so deep, fill it with water, then rock out the mud with a wet-dry Shop-Vac. Keep adding water and removing mud until you're done. If "dig" a 42-inch hole this way in less than 2 minutes. —Raymond Osterm, Koscusko, Mich.



Help from the medicine cabinet

9 | Toothbrush for AC fins

To straighten the bent most fins in an air conditioner, grab an old toothbrush. Just press the bristles onto the fin above or below the bent spots, then pull and push the brush through those spots until the fins snap flat out. —Neil Pennington, Prince Georges, W.

10 | Instant tile polish

The exposed ends of my in-laws' stone tile backslashes weren't polished. Fix the tiles. —Steve Crouse, Boyles, N.Y.



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11 | Flower substitute

I always wear a daisy mask when eating a meal on a date, which makes it a hassle to blow away a seed. So I use a baby's large-size nasal aspirator or a kitchen helper to do the job for me. —*Leah Kimbrell, Spokane, Wash.*

12 | Wish I'd thought of that

Wrap flowering bulbs in 9-inch hardware cloth as you plant them. The bulbs grow through the mesh, but squirrels can't eat them! —*Bob Savory, Knoxville, Tenn.*

13 | DIY hose snake

The store and the rental wanted more than \$1,000 for a single piece of heavy black mar-

ble to match the mosaic tiles on my shower floor. So I bought some inexpensive polished marble tiles and sanded them—first with 60-grit paper and working up to 320-grit—until the finish matched the mosaic tiles. Then I cut them to size and sanded the edges. Voilà! Heavy marble now for pennies per linear foot! —*Jennifer Deffen, Escalon, Calif.*

14 | Sandy soil, tamed

I thought that installing fence posts would be easy with a power auger, but every time we pulled it up, the sandy soil fell right back in the hole. Finally, we got a hose and wet down the soil in the hole. After that, the excavated sand stayed right where we put it! —*Paul Peters, Bellevue, Mass.*

15 | Ceramic cabinet floor

When I tiled my kitchen floor, I also tiled the inside bottom of the cabinets under the sink to protect the wood from leaks and spills. —*Van Linderoos, Phoenix, Ariz.*

16 | Toothpick shim

You can keep loose drawer bottoms from rattling by putting wood glue on a toothpick and tacking it between the top of the drawer and the runners. Cut off the excess with a knife and wipe away excess glue. —*George Chesley, Hastings, Mich.*

17 | Drywall-bucket scaffold

I screwed the ends of two 4-foot boards to two drywall-bucket lids and snapped them onto the buckets that carry my tools. That gave me: (1) a ready-made sawhorse, (2) a scaffold that lets me reach 8-foot ceilings, and (3) a rest for lunch. The boards and attached lids are lighter and much easier to carry than sawhorses or a step ladder. —*Sam Stout, Plainfield, Conn.*

15



18 | Dust catcher

Before drilling into drywall, take an ordinary newspaper, fold it in the tub, and tape it to the wall just below the area where you're working. As you drill, the dust falls in the envelope, not on the floor. —*Clifford Reinhold, Madison, Conn.*

19 | String saw

When you're cutting PVC pipe in a tight space, loop a nylon strap around the pipe and pull the ends firmly back and forth. The heat generated by the strap cuts right through the plastic. —*Rand Watson, Charlotte, N.C.*

20 | Sander for coped cuts

I like to cope my trim, so when I'm installing shoe molding I use contact cement to stick a piece of 80-grit sandpaper to the face of a molding scrap. Then, after I cut my cope, I have a sand that conforms to the cut to the exact shape I need. —*Joe Rucker, Silver Lake Park, Minn.*

21 | No-compass scriber

All I need to mark scribe lines for the back edge of a crownmold is a



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washer. I got a flat on the counter so that it touches the wall where the gap is widest, and put my pencil up in its hole. Then I roll the washer along the wall with the pencil tip, leaving a perfect scribe line on the counter. The bigger the gap, the wider the washer has to be. —*Jay Kaine, Layton, Utah*

22 | Pipe-cutting guide

When I'm cutting PVC pipe with a hacksaw, I first tighten a hose clamp next to the cut line to act as a guide to make the cut square. When I'm done, I leave the clamp on to fix-rat the cut with a file. —*George Urban, Harvard, Wis.*

23 | Wallpaper smoother

My favorite tool for smoothing wallpaper is one I make by cutting a section from the side of a plastic 5-gallon paint bucket. —*Gary Lewis, Westerville, Ohio*

24 | Help from the kitchen

Used to be, if I had Danish oil finish oiled on the inside of the can lid, I'd have to open the can with pump pliers. Then I remembered my grandfather's trick of placing



wax paper under the lid when he mixed shellac in a jar. Now I use wax paper when sealing all my cans and jars. —*Roger Rayburn, Colorado Springs, Colo.*

25 | Vinegar cleans faucets

To remove the calcium deposits under faucet handles, take off the handles and cover the dipoint with cotton balls soaked in white vinegar. Once the buildup is gone, rinse and wipe the parts clean with a dry cloth, and replace them. —*William Cline, Craft, Mo.*

26 | Waste not, want not

Great preserver
I got tired of having drywall mud and premixed grout dry up and go bad, so now I use a couple of cheap paper towels in their buckets. In this dry climate, it really helps extend their shelf life. —*Kim Scholze, Chrysan, Wyo.*

27 | Spray-foam saver

After you've correctly applied a can of spray foam, don't throw away its straw, uncap it and clean it out with WD-40. Just insert the WD-40 and blow into the spray-foam straw and give it a few squirts. Don't forget to wipe off the wet foam with clean rag when you're done. —*Jody Dargatzis, Columbus, Pa.*

28 | Rust stoppers

Here in south Florida, rusty tools are a big problem. So every time I receive a package that contains those little silver-painted, I place them in wet-bet drawers and power tool cases, where they absorb moisture and help keep my tools rust-free. —*Phil Houghton, Cape Coral, Fla.*

25

ALL
ABOUT

Retaining walls

You, our **TOH online community members**, told us that building a retaining wall tops the summer-to-do list. So we lined up the experts to help you create a sturdy and stylish structure for leveling your landscape. *By Sid Vagstad*

Nature's uneven terrain has no choice, until you try to play croquet on a hilly lawn or enjoy a candlelit dinner on an off-kilter patio. Install a retaining wall as a backdrop, though, and you can literally carve out functional outdoor spaces where once there were only precarious slopes.

More than problem-solvers, retaining walls also have a sculptural quality that adds definition to the landscape, and they can be made from various materials to evoke different styles. Stacked timbers or mortared stones, for instance, can impart a rustic look, while poured concrete is sleekly modern.

Just keep in mind that when planning for a wall meant to hold back tons of soil, there's little room for error. How effective your wall will be and how long it'll last—decades or just a few years—depends largely on things you can't see, such as a mound festering beneath the ground and drainage to keep water from breaking up behind the wall.

On the following pages, we cover the basics, from materials choices for a new wall to upgrade options for walls you've already got. We'll also share inspiring examples of retaining-wall projects from some of your fellow TOH readers. And it's all here because you asked for a little help in getting your landscape-leveling projects off the ground.

you
asked
for it

Anatomy of a retaining wall

The four parts of a mortared stone wall. Components can vary for other wall types.

Drainage stone

Flows water behind the wall.

Filter fabric

Prevents soil from clogging the drainage stone.

Backer

The backer board sits on the earth, about 1 inch for every 1 foot of wall height.

Weap hole

Spanning every 4 to 6 feet, it lets water drain through the wall base.

Footing

A reinforced concrete support beneath.



footing drains water



The secret of a professional-looking retaining wall is a uniform and proper base structure. Designed to keep all its pieces, steps built on this same material look unified. (Materials shown here: Englemann's, Portland, Ore.; cost: \$1,100 for square foot, including labor and materials.)

VITALS

How much do they cost?

Prices start at \$4.50 per square foot for poured concrete. \$5.00 for interlocking concrete block, \$6.15 for pressure-treated pine and about \$11 for stone. Installation or supplies, such as drainage stone or filter fabric, are not included.

How long will they last?

Timber can last up to 40 years; there's no limit on the life span of a properly well-maintained or concrete wall.



DIY or hire a pro?

Timber and other looking-concrete block walls are DIY-friendly. Mortared masonry, stacked and concrete structures usually best left to a mason.

Does height matter?

Codes mandate that walls taller than 4 feet be designed by an engineer and built by a professional.

How much care?

Other than an occasional cleaning of the weep holes, retaining walls don't need much attention.

Where and how to use them

TORH readers show the four major ways that retaining walls can solve a problem and improve your property

TERRACE THE BACKYARD



WHO: Mike Staber
WHERE: Manassas, Va.
WHAT: Stacked limestone blocks to level off a steep decline and make a decent area for entertaining and game playing.



CARVE OUT A PATIO



WHO: Dominique and Eric Roberts
WHERE: Silver Spring, Md.
WHAT: Cut into the slope behind their home, lined the ledge with stacked concrete blocks, and paved a patio with a sitting wall.



TRANSITION TO THE SIDEWALK



WHO: Sandra Yoshida
WHERE: Torrance, Calif.
WHAT: Used stacked-block walls to create a flower-filled buffer between the sidewalk and her front door.



CREATE A DRIVEWAY



WHO: Clifford Piche
WHERE: Joplin, Mo.
WHAT: Raised the grade in Maynard and built a hybrid stone-and-timber wall to hold up the outer edges of a new gravel drive.



Wall materials

It's not just about looks. Price, construction, and whether you can DIY also factor in



1 TIMBERS: Affordable and good for slopes, the Cedar, Redwood and Fir sold at lumberyards and home centers are sold together with screens, aprons, or rebar. These walls need only a loose crushed stone footing and T-shaped timber designs fit snuggly into the ground contact should survive 40 years.

COST: Western Red under or rebarbed lasts about 20 years. Pressure-treated pine is better for ground contact should survive 40 years.



2 MASONRY: With sufficient drainage, stone, brick or concrete block walls are strong and lasting. You can lay these materials out stone by stone and leave them to set, but you'll likely need a mason to install them. Mortared walls need an extra rebarbed concrete footing set below the frost line and require weep holes to relieve soil pressure. Mortar-free dry stacked stone walls need only a crushed stone footing.

COST: Flatstone: \$30 per square foot installed; stoneyard.com



3 POURED CONCRETE: The strongest and most durable choice, it can be stained, colored, textured or carved to look like natural stone. Buy concrete in bags from the home center, or mix, delivered by a ready-mix concrete truck. Leave the design to the mason and pouring to the contractor. Like most of masonry, these walls are tapered by an inverted concrete footing, and require weep holes. This is the only wall type that isn't belted (beard back) against the earth.

COST: Ready mix from a truck, \$4.30 per square foot installed; concrete.com



4 INTERLOCKING CONCRETE BLOCKS: An easy choice for DIYers because of their light weight, flat sides, and the foolproof way they fit together without mortar. These blocks, sold at stone yards and home centers, have a rough face for a quarried look and come in a variety of gray, tan, and white. Like timber and dry stacked stone walls, they rest on a crushed-stone footing. Heavy-duty mesh anchors every other course against the ground.

COST: Versa-Tek Weathered Maple (shown at left) \$21.45 per square foot installed; wallcornerdepot.com

see how it's done

Watch 10-minute videos on building Versa-Tek walls out of timber and concrete blocks: <http://bit.ly/seehowitsdone>



"Can my wall be saved?"

Only a structural engineer or mason can say for sure, but if yours shows any of these signs, it may be time for a new one



WHO:
Andy Wilson
WHERE:
Holbrook, NY
WHAT: Was a mortared stone wall that's tipping

Warning: Walls like Andy's (shown at right) that start rotting are not long for this world. Whether it's caused by tree roots, poor drainage, or a failed footing, a leaning wall will probably have to be demolished and rebuilt from scratch.

Checking: You can fill minor blemishes in poured concrete with hydraulic cement. Is mortar laid with trowel and damaged joint filler and repair. But if the cracks are more than 1/4 inch wide and deep, and more than 2 feet long, the wall may have structural damage. Call in a pro to assess whether the affected area can be repaired or has to be replaced.

Reinforcing: A pronounced dip in the courses of a timber or interlocking block wall indicates that the footing has failed in one spot. A pro may be able to replace the failing base with the damaged area and rebuild just that section of the wall.

Reinforcing: When mortar in masonry develops a pot belly, the likely culprit is a buildup of water pressure behind it. Try drilling a 1/4-inch weep hole with a masonry bit to encourage drainage. A ledge in a timber or interlocking block wall is typically caused by a lack of anchoring. Careful excavation behind the wall may allow providing concrete beneath. Consult a pro before starting work.



UPGRADE YOUR CONCRETE WALL

Whether it's poured into forms or cast into blocks, concrete can often lack a little sparkle. Here are some ways to dress it up

1 STUCCO Smooth away the flats and any surface blemishes with a coat of cement-based stucco. When finished and painted an earthy shade, stucco will also complement your landscape. Shown: Quikrete Finish Coat Stucco in Palomine. 25 cents per square foot; quikrete.com

2 STAIN Give interlocking blocks a makeover with a penetrating finish in a warm reddish or golden hue. Redstone stain can be applied with a sprayer or rolled directly onto a clean, unsealed surface. Shown: Natural Stone Veneers, Tuscan Collection, starting at \$4 per square foot; mcmurphy.com



3 VENEER Turn even a plain surface into the look of brick or stone, or combine to mimic stone or brick. The pattern and look are as flexible as the material. Shown: Natural Stone Veneers, Tuscan Collection, starting at \$4 per square foot; mcmurphy.com



PHOTO TOP: JEFFREY M. HARRIS/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; BOTTOM LEFT: JEFFREY M. HARRIS/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; BOTTOM RIGHT: JEFFREY M. HARRIS/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; BOTTOM CENTER: JEFFREY M. HARRIS/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; BOTTOM RIGHT: JEFFREY M. HARRIS/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Green it up

Use plants to soften a rugged expanse of masonry. Here are some colorful perennials that will climb up the face or hang over the top of your retaining wall

Low-growing, Japanese garden catpaw (Japanese perennials) bushy stems in mortar-and-stone wall

+ Climbers

Rooted along the base of the wall, these plants grow up in search of sun. Most benefit from a trellis to help them establish the convolvulus remove the support after a year or two



Climbing hydrangea (perennial) (petals) Clusters of bright white flowers stand out from the new, heart-shaped foliage at summer. Grows up to 10 feet high and 2 feet wide in Zones 4 to 8. \$15. www.gardenofeden.com



'New Dawn' climbing rose (Rose, New Dawn) The glossy leaves of this semi-climber are covered in bright, pale pink summer flowers. Grows up to 10 feet high and 8 feet wide in Zones 5 to 9. \$12. www.newdawn.com

+ Drapers

Planted on top of the wall, these plants spill over the edge for a dramatic cascading effect. They sit on trellis or support supplemental watering, which encourages susceptibility on the wall



Fairy rose (Rose, Fairy) This glossy, resistant rose has shiny green leaves and profuse clusters of small, light pink flowers. Grows up to 3 feet high and 2 feet wide in Zones 5 to 9. \$12. www.gardenofeden.com



Rock cotoneaster (Cotoneaster horizontalis) A shrub with dark green, glossy leaves, it has tiny, light pink flowers that yield a crop of bright red berries in the fall. Grows up to 2 feet high and 2 feet wide in Zones 4 to 9. \$15. www.gardenofeden.com



Virginia creeper (Perennial) (petals) Four-leafed leaves might mean this vine is up to 10 feet high and 2 feet wide in Zones 4 to 8. \$15. www.gardenofeden.com



Trumpet honeysuckle (Perennial) (petals) Blooming in spring, this vine is covered in clusters of bright, light pink flowers. Grows up to 20 feet high and 2 feet wide in Zones 4 to 9. \$10. www.gardenofeden.com



Creeping phlox (Perennial) (petals) In spring, this low-growing, four-leafed shrub is covered in clusters of small, light pink flowers. Grows up to 4 inches high and 2 feet wide in Zones 3 to 9. \$10. www.gardenofeden.com



Ice plant (Perennial) (petals) The magenta, daisy-like flowers of this vine, for many, are a sight to behold in summer. Grows up to 3 inches high and 2 feet wide in Zones 5 to 9. \$10. www.gardenofeden.com

Our cast of veteran experts

TOM SILVA
General ContractorMARK ADAMS
Master CarpenterRICHARD TRETHEWEY
Plumbing and Wiring ExpertROGER COOK
Landscape ContractorKEVIN O'CONNOR
Host

For this special reader-created edition of Ask This Old House, we asked our usual lineup—Tom, Mark, Richard, Roger, and Kevin—to let the community of experts from thisoldhouse.com's message boards provide the answers to questions submitted by the message-board users. (The odd names are the "handlers" people use on the boards.) So if you need advice, guidance, and even sympathy for your home-improvement conundrums, just log on at advice.thisoldhouse.com. The This Old House community stands ready to help, night and day.

"jennifert" asks:
I have a dog that likes to dig. Any suggestions on how to landscape my yard to discourage such behavior?



"saceml" replies:
My Jack Russell terrier absolutely loves to dig. Soil had a synthetic grass called Spalten (spalten one) installed in my backyard. It drains well, costs about the same as sod, and looks a lot like the real thing.

So far, so good. My dog can't smell anything under the "grass," so he doesn't seem to feel the need to dig. Just rake off leaves and clean up areas with dish soap and the hose.

By the way, I don't completely deny my dog has pleasure. I take him down the road to a vacant lot where he can dig holes to his heart's content.

Roger Cook comments: Another anti-digging strategy is to cover an area with fresh stone mulch. I'd place the stone on top of a heavy-duty, puncture-resistant geotextile fabric (landscape cloth), the kind that's often used under high-traffic paved areas. Unlike the lightweight fabrics used for weed control, a geotextile covers a strong barrier against digging but doesn't interfere with drainage.

A carpet of synthetic grass in a fenced backyard curbs this Jack Russell terrier's urge to dig. Another way to deter digging is to lay a heavy-duty geotextile fabric and cover it with a 2-inch-thick layer of stone mulch.

"Antler" asks:
What size shelf should I put in my rec room?

I'd like to run it along the wall so that my friends have a place to put their bottles while they play pool. What height and width should it be?

"MLBSP" replies: I'd use 1x6 stock for the shelf and support it with decorative wood or metal brackets add at home-improvement stores. Space the brackets to every other stud. The average height of a standing adult's elbows would be a comfortable height for the shelf. Then your friends can rest an arm as it while they're standing around. You can attach some molding to the shelf's edge to give it a little more depth and make it look more finished.

Norm Abram comments: These are good suggestions, but I'd make the shelf even wider, if you have room. A 1x6 might be okay for a glass, but I don't think it would be a comfortable place to rest an arm. I'd use a 1x8 for the shelf material.

"jollyhouse" asks:
Why didn't my forsythia have lots of flowers this year?

It used to bloom beautifully, but these days it hardly flowers at all. How can I get it blooming again?

"mewmew" replies:
Cut it way back by a third, or less—after it blooms next year. That gets rid of the old wood and encourages new growth. I did this a few years back and my blossoms are bigger than ever and bloom like crazy.

Roger Cook comments: Good advice. As forsythia grows, its branches

WHAT IS IT?



A - Peintfresh spigot

B - Drainpipe hanger

C - Wash cap

D - Or...

FOR THE ANSWER SEE PAGE 32



When the water in a rain barrel is plagued with algae, adding goldfish clears it up.

branches don't get enough sunlight. Pruning, along with fertilizing, is the right solution.

"aradus58T" asks:
What can I do about the smelly water in my rain barrel?

The water that I collect for my garden has turned green and smells really bad. Any suggestions?

"mollypunk" replies: I added goldfish to my rain barrels. They keep the water very clean by eating the algae that turns it green. They're also fun to watch. One note: Goldfish are creatures, so don't dump them in a stream or river at the end of the season. Instead, give them to a child with a fish tank or return them to the store.

Roger Cook comments: Good idea with the fish. Another approach would be to add barley straw pellets (available online), which kill algae but won't harm plants. Or try using solar-powered pump to circulate the water and keep it from stagnating.

"meyer" asks:
Why doesn't one of my rooms cool down?

We just installed a bigger, more efficient central air conditioning system that cools everything except my son's bedroom. What's wrong?

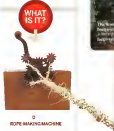
"redwings" replies: Bigger isn't always better when it comes to AC systems. The unit may be shutting off before the bedroom can get cool. You might be able to reduce airflow at other supply registers and force more air to the bedroom if the duct system is too small for the blower. Maybe the room has inadequate return air flow, which prevents cold air from coming. To find out, stand outside the room, close the door, and while the system is working, feel if an is making out beneath the door. If so, the room needs a return air duct to take air back to the blower.

Running the system fan continuously should help average out the temperature throughout the house when the conditioner is off. The fan speed should be set to the lowest speed, which is denoted as FAN/PRO.

Richard Trethewey comments: Turning the loss of an old design suggestion will help only if the bedroom has a properly used entrance door. Also, try to reduce the loss point in that room by installing solar screens (phases) on the outside and reflective curtains on the inside.

"Cabin" asks:
How do I fix stripped screw holes?
Some hinge screws made a cabinet get ripped out. Can I repair the damage and put back the hardware?

"A. Spruce" replies: If the screw hole is stripped, then just dip the ends of several wood toothpicks in wood glue, tap them gently into the



Rope-making machine
Patented in 1817 by Nathan Wherry of Highland Park, Michigan, this portable tool enabled six-year-olds to make their own rope out of boiling twine. It belongs to Ron White, chairman of the What's Old House Committee of the Midwest Tool Collectors Association.



THESE TREES ARE THE PERFECT CHOICE FOR A LOW-Maintenance privacy hedge.



I want a low-maintenance evergreen privacy hedge. What should I plant?

—GLORIA CHIN TRUMBULL, COON

Roger Cook replies: Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*) is a good choice because it doesn't need pruning to keep its full shape from top to bottom, and adapts to a wide range of growing conditions from Zones 2 to 7—including your Zone 4—as long as it has full sun.

Cost: About \$42 per tree with fertilizer, compost and mulch. **Time:** About 1 hour per tree. **Difficulty:** Medium. It takes some care to dig the trees and move them.

To get a sense of privacy right away, select specimens that are at least 6 feet tall, with green foliage and moist root balls. They'll reach 15 feet or more when mature. These trees need to be planted far enough apart so that they'll be touching when full grown; they'll be stunted if put too close together. The spacing depends on the variety you choose. To find the correct spacing for different varieties, go to dothelibrary.com/arb.

In time, as your hedge fills in, you'll have a solid wall of green to enjoy year-round.

STEP BY STEP

Planting a privacy hedge

1. Dig a trench

Mark out the length and width of the largest root ball. Then use spray-painted boards to set trenches that are two to three times wider and 2 inches or deeper than the root ball. Make the trench long enough to space the trees so that they will just touch when they reach their mature width—3 to 4 feet apart for these evergreen arbs. As you dig, transfer the soil with a spade shovel into a tarp.

2. Roll the tree into the trench

Lay a bottom of green plastic on the side and remove the top. Then stand both ends up and gently roll the soil ball into the trench. (If the arbutus root ball is too large to roll it into the trench, then cut away as much material as possible.) Turn each tree's trunk side to face your yard. Measure from the trunk to get the spacing and from the trench edge to each trunk to align them.



3. Tease out the roots

If a cultivator gently scraped an arbutus, tap and break up each root ball to expose the long roots that slowly swim and forage in a wheelbarrow mix 2 parts excavated soil with 1 part compost. Then break the trench up again. Place a sod den around each tree, just wider than the diameter of the root ball.

4. Soak the soil

If it's a cold winter, water will be too slow to be absorbed. Then 18 days before the water table in the second time (14 days) the done and water 2 to 3 inch layers of mulch 6 inches away from the trunk to prevent rot in the first growing season. Water once a week unless it rains. After that, water or if there's a long dry two-week or just late sandy soil four weeks if your soil is clay.

hole, and cut them off flush with a utility knife. After the glue cures, drill a pilot hole that's slightly smaller than the diameter of the screw shank, and reinsert the plug. But if the original hole has been seriously enlarged, drill it out to accept a wood screw. Glue it in place, then drill a pilot hole in the wood and reinstall the hardware.

Tom Silva comments: Both of these techniques work very well.

asker's 1st asks:
How do I fit baseboard where there's a change in the floor's height?

Our tile floor is lower than the hardwood floor next to it. What's the best way to install baseboard at this spot so that it looks right?

"Jink" replies: For the cleanest look, keep the top of the baseboard the same height. Just run some of the trimmer along the wood floor so that the height matches the baseboard along the tile.

Noreen Abram comments: This is a good solution for the baseboard. In fact, that's what I did to handle a similar situation at my house. But if the hardwood has a profile, I'd make an angled transition piece and cut the end of each baseboard at an angle to fit right against it.

send your questions to ask oldhouse

go to oldhouse.com/enksh or write to Ask The Old House, The Old House magazine, 325 West 30th St., New York, NY 10001.

Include a complete address and phone number. Please send no more than 100 words and a photograph if possible. We'll publish as many questions as we can, but we can't guarantee that all questions will be answered. We'll return all letters but not the photos.

You asked for more info on table saws.



WHO: Chip Rangel
WHERE: Northampton, Ohio
WHAT: Looking for a table saw so he can finish his basement

O What kind of table saw do I need to tackle the DIY projects around my house?

We've been flooded with requests from readers eager to add this versatile tool to their shop. So here's a two-page table-top primer to help you get a handle on the strengths and weaknesses of the three basic types. Use it to find a saw in your price range that strikes the right balance of portability and cutting accuracy.

PORTABLE SAW

Price: \$120-\$170, with cloud

Highlight: In 15- to 320-volt motor-outlets with greater size in care use, although it can log down but that is needed too quickly. The cabinets are typically placed in with cast-aluminum tops and extruded aluminum bases. In these models, the meters are supported by brackets mounted to the underside of the table. The resulting vibration reduces accuracy. These brackets are usually made of lightweight steel or aluminum, which are susceptible to warping. And because these units are small cutting full size sheets of plywood or MDF isn't a good idea while to the front is supported by an extension table.

What to look for: Folding stand with wheels and adjustable level; built-in tie extensions for handling sheet goods; screws for tie-tune force; dust collector (optional)

Other readers: Bosch 4000 OH with stand, \$500; brocktools.com. Craftsman 28450 \$290; sears.com. DeWalt DW744005 with stand, \$630; dewalt.com. Jet JET5 10MK5 with stand, \$900; jettools.com. Makita 2705K1 with stand, \$650; makita.com. Ryobi RT330, \$220; ryobitools.com.

SAFETY-CHECK Before you buy, be sure your table saw meets Underwriters Laboratories' 967 safety standard. Some saws are still being sold without the anti-kickback devices that UL requires. All the saws shown or listed here meet that safety standard.

light are light
and power is
enough to
handle most



From 2002 to 2004, the number of registered companies in the manufacturing sector grew by 10.5%.

more table saws
To see more examples of and specs for table saws, go to thisoldhouse.com/saws.



CABINET SAW

Price \$1,350-\$1,600

highlight: Super 220-volt motor with as much as 5 horsepower cuts the hardest stock, bare after hour without bogging down. Cutblends are metal and stand to the floor for the best dust collection. The wide-top-are cast iron, and the blunders are cabinet-mounted, so you get minimal vibration and maximum accuracy. Once fixed, it's a place that, where it stays.

A global new Fast Advanced Laboratory reflects
newest and accurate fast and available

What to look for: Cast iron extension tables, adjustable
brunnings and fence, accessible adjustment wheels,
lump on/off switch, dust collection port, mobile base

Other makes: Gemini/GSC: \$3,000 www.gemini.co.uk; Gemini/G66S: \$1,800 gtraily.com; Jet/J20675PK: \$2,900 jettrucks.com; Lajuma/MT50000 0860: \$1,700 lajumatrucks.com; Powermatic/2000: \$2,700 powermatic.com; Sawtop/31230: \$3,560 sawtop.com; Steel City/3990S: \$1,380 steelcitytrucks.com.

Costs \$6,150; Unisaw with push-button action lock for quick blade changes. 2.800 dollars (variable price).

rubbed raw
character
without
the high
crown



HYBRID SAW

Price \$450-\$600

Highlight: This combo of features from portable and cabinet saws pairs broad cast-iron table tops with 15-amp, 120-volt motors, and hefty steel cabinets with table-mounted turnarms. You can carry this size, but you can roll it around a shop.

A good sure bet Experienced officers who want more accuracy and capacity without spending big bucks for a patrol unit.

What to look for: Cast iron extension tables, adjustable bases and drawers.

Other makes: Purley Cable PCB27011
5650 delcorcable.com



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- When crosscutting, do not cut wood against the fence.

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Center for 'Old House' History, page 42

Before: John Wilson

200-27-303 Light House

For more on Wilson and his work, visit thisoldhouse.com

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Dining room: Chandeliers & Lighting

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Dining room: Chandeliers & Lighting

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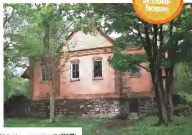
The History: Our 113-year-old home which has historical and Queen Anne architectural details

was first built as an African-American schoolhouse by the abolitionist, John Mercer Langston. He was also the first dean of the law school at Howard University, the first African American elected to the U.S. Congress from Virginia, and the great uncle of the poet Langston Hughes. The school was closed in 1958 and turned into a private residence.

Why save it? After gutting the 1950s drywall we discovered that the 2,800-square-foot school still had its original sawnwood, millwork, and doors, as well as some old chalkboards. It also has all its original windows.

What it needs: We started restoring the place ourselves but, sadly, ran out of cash. We did manage to put on a renovation, but still needed electrical, HVAC, and plumbing systems, a kitchen and bath, and loads of cosmetic work. But being up this incredible piece of African-American history will be an education in itself.

—KERRY AND JENNIFER KRAHN



✓ The three-story schoolhouse has a stone foundation and a full-width shingled gable.
✓ It comes with four city lots, including almost an acre.

✓ Look at those high ceilings and windows.
✓ A classroom.
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